

Aging baby-boomers will have to innovate

Having fewer children, they will be counting on an extended family and non-traditional networks.

Montreal, Quebec – May 28, 2010 – As their autonomy fades, tomorrow's elderly will need to create non-traditional support networks or pay for the care they receive.

This is the conclusion of Jacques Légaré, professor at the Université de Montréal, who studies aging baby-boomers, a generation for whom children are relatively rare and stable couples almost an exception.

In a paper presented at the 2010 Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences, held this week at Concordia University in Montreal, Mr. Légaré shows how the family circle available to the elderly will evolve from now until 2030.

It is usually the elderly person's family circle that provides care. Mr. Légaré notes that about 70 per cent of the care provided for frail seniors comes from the informal network – essentially the spouse or the children. This is only possible because today's elderly — baby-boomers' parents — have more children to care for them and generally live in stable couples.

This situation will soon change. Divorce, common-law unions, blended families and relatively few children per couple are factors to consider. In addition to this, death rates have declined considerably, to the point where average life expectancy has grown considerably. Couples who have not split up will be living together longer.

"Tomorrow's elderly — today's boomers — had far fewer children. Who will take care of them?" the professor wonders. "They risk finding themselves in difficult circumstances and might have to turn to the public system or pay their way."

According to Mr. Légaré, baby boomers not interested in paying or who can't afford to pay will have to innovate and seek out non-traditional networks — friends, siblings and even cousins.

The research on boomers must adapt as well. Demographers, who are increasingly turning to micro-simulation to make projections, will have to factor in the recourse to these non-traditional networks. According to professor Légaré, new programs must be developed to model these extended families and new support systems.

If informal services change, the public system must also adapt. "Boomers have done nothing like the others," Mr. Légaré points out. "They stand out from the other cohorts, and we believe they will do so again."

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